

PRESS RELEASE

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

Fourteenth District, Michigan
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus

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CONYERS APPLAUDS COURT'S OK OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PROGRAM

Representative John Conyers, Jr. (D-MI), the Ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, commended the majority on the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals for reversing a lower court opinion and approving the affirmative action program used in admissions by the University of Michigan Law School. Conyers said that, "Contrary to the belief of judges in some parts of the country, Justice Powell's opinion in Bakke remains the law of the land. The notion that the compelling social need for a diverse student body should be jettisoned in the name of equal protection -- in a social context where discrimination persists, where funding for schools is disparate, where social and historical conditions often perpetuate de facto segregation -- is a notion that is not only out of touch with Constitutional law, but 21st century social reality."

Conyers stated that, "Affirmative action has never been about racial preferences. Affirmative action is part remedial and part progress and opportunity. Studies indicate that being a part of a diverse student body in higher education can significantly affect the extent to which graduates move on to live racially and ethnically integrated lives -- in effect, students educated in diverse settings are better equipped to thrive in a diverse society. The most important social issue we face today in this new century is how a highly diverse social people -- a people that will have no majority race by the middle of the century -- can coexist and prosper together. Our diversity should be seen as our strength, not weakness. "

Conyers observed that he was deeply disturbed by indications that anti-affirmative action groups remained ready to attack traditional affirmative action programs like those in Michigan and new, post-litigation, state initiatives, like the Texas 10% plan, designed to open elite state institutions to all students graduation in the top tier of their high school class.

Conyers stated that, "We as a nation are at the crossroad of continued progress in the area of civil rights. We need to ask ourselves if we are willing to backtrack to the pre-Brown era when the races faced starkly different, and unequal worlds. Just as the Jim Crow laws hastened an era of state sanctioned, segregation, today's assault on affirmative action could harken a period of unofficial de facto segregation. Instead of 'playing the race card' we need to work together as a nation to build upon the diversity envisioned by Justice Powell and truly eradicate our legacy of discrimination."

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